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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 001842

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NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR C. COURVILLE

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [ZI](#) [MDC](#)  
SUBJECT: MDC SECRETARY-GENERAL ON PARTY TRAVEL,  
CAMPAIGNING, INTER-PARTY RELATIONS

REF: (A) HARARE 1787 (B) HARARE 1562

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher W. Dell under Section 1.5 b/d

[11.](#) (C) SUMMARY: Movement for Democratic Change  
Secretary-General Welshman Ncube on November 4 updated poloff

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on the developing itinerary of opposition party leaders,  
including regional travel and a planned trip by him and Party  
President Morgan Tsvangirai to the United States in  
mid-November. He said the party was finalizing a slate of  
candidates for possible participation in next year's  
parliamentary elections, which were still scheduled for  
March. He reported positive developments suggesting a  
continuing opening of campaign space for the opposition but  
dismissed South African Government suggestions that the  
ruling party was preparing to re-engage in inter-party talks  
on constitutional change. END SUMMARY.

Opposition's Hectic Travel Schedule  
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[12.](#) (C) Ncube reported that Tsvangirai and party  
Vice-President Gibson Sibanda were scheduled to be in South  
Africa November 4, and to meet with heads of state in Nigeria  
November 6, in Ghana November 8, and in Senegal on November  
[10.](#) (Note: The delegation also is slated to receive media  
strategy training from IRI while in West Africa. End note.)  
They hoped to secure meetings with the presidents of  
Botswana, Lesotho, and Burkina Faso during that period as  
well, but scheduling details had yet to be worked out. Ncube  
indicated that the party was getting the cold shoulder from  
SADC troika member Lesotho, possibly because of the rapport  
between Foreign Minister Mudenge and the Lesotho foreign  
minister, who Ncube said had been classmates.

[13.](#) (C) After covering southern and western Africa, the  
delegation would be joined by Ncube for visits to Brussels,  
London, Oslo, and Stockholm before travelling to the United  
States. During the U.S. leg, dates for which were yet to be  
determined, the delegation hoped to visit the State  
Department, Capitol Hill, the MDC's Washington Office and  
Zimbabwe emigre elements, among other interlocutors. The  
delegation would then swing by Ethiopia (where they hoped to  
engage the African Union), Kenya, and Tanzania by early  
December before returning to Zimbabwe.

[14.](#) (C) Ncube singled out the Obasanjo meeting as  
particularly important. He said Obasanjo indicated that he  
wanted to remain engaged on Zimbabwe, notwithstanding past  
frustrations. As the African Union Chair, he could be  
particularly helpful in engineering a meaningful AU election  
observation group. Moreover, Nigeria could keep Zimbabwe on  
the Commonwealth's agenda, notwithstanding Zimbabwe's  
withdrawal from the organization, and had leverage through a  
bilateral relationship that was important to Zimbabwe.

Campaign Space Opening Up?  
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[15.](#) (C) Ncube reported that he and Deputy Secretary-General  
Gift Chimankire would be advancing the party's domestic  
agenda while the President was abroad. They planned to be  
addressing rallies and meeting with party district and ward  
structures in the Midlands in the next few days. Police were  
becoming notably less obstructive with respect to party  
meetings. Instead of disapproving applications on specious  
grounds or never responding and then closing meetings down,  
police generally were approving meeting requests around the  
country, with few exceptions. When applications were  
disapproved, it was usually with some apparent justification  
and without prejudice to reschedule or to relocate.  
(Comment: This appeared to continue a trend first reported by  
Tsvangirai aide Gandhi Mudzingwa in July, ref B. End

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comment.) Local organizers still faced intimidation and  
disruptions by local ruling party elements, but not as widely  
as before or with quite the apparent level of official  
impunity.

16. (C) The Secretary-General did not comment on prospects for MDC participation in the March election or on the party's recent call to delay the election. Nonetheless, he allowed that the party was proceeding with efforts to complete its slate of candidates to participate in the election. The party had identified candidates in about 85 of the 120 parliamentary constituencies. Most of the remaining selections were in the Mashonaland (East, West and Central) with a few left in Harare and Manicaland as well.

#### Bennet Case Implications

17. (C) Ncube said the eligibility of recently incarcerated MDC MP Roy Bennet to stand for election was murky (ref A). The constitution conditioned an MP's ineligibility on a criminal sentence exceeding six months being imposed by a court, not Parliament (which imposed Bennet's sentence). Of more immediate concern, though, was Bennet's possible expulsion from the body and the holding of a by-election before the March national elections. An MP can be expelled from the body if he is absent without adequate cause (an issue that would be debatable in Bennet's politically charged case) for 21 consecutive days that Parliament is in session. Under the current parliamentary schedule (assuming he could not get a court order freeing him earlier), that would occur in mid-December for Bennet. That would still probably leave inadequate time to conduct a by-election before March. In quiet inter-party negotiations, ZANU-PF had proposed to release Bennet from jail in return for his expulsion from Parliament and a declaration of his seat's vacancy. Ncube indicated that the Parliament didn't have the authority to expel him under current law, but that Bennet and the MDC would likely accept his suspension for the remainder of the current term in return for his release. Ncube said that the ZANU-PF offer underscored its interest in trying to get a 2/3 majority before the parliamentary election so it could amend the constitution to its liking without MDC support. (Note: If ZANU-PF is able to capture Bennet's seat, it would still be one seat short of a 2/3 majority. End note.) Ncube was not optimistic about Bennet's chances for release under a high court petition scheduled to be heard on November 9.

#### ZANU-PF Temporizing on Talks

18. (C) According to Ncube, ZANU-PF was still dragging its feet on long-standing discussions about a package of constitutional amendments. Since the MDC publicly announced in July its conditional suspension of participation in elections, the ruling party had backed off from the package tentatively agreed between Ncube and Minister for Justice, Parliamentary and Legal Affairs Patrick Chinamasa. Ncube said that Chinamasa told him that Mugabe himself had scotched further ZANU-PF efforts on the matter. According to Chinamasa, Mugabe had said that the MDC was "taking them for a ride" and would end up reneging on any agreed amendments or demanding more at the last minute.

19. (C) Ncube maintained that the MDC remained interested in rekindling talks but had little faith in the ruling party's sincerity. The opposition privately had made it clear to ZANU-PF counterparts that the constitutional talks were not linked to the issue of election participation; they would vote for the agreed constitutional changes even before making a decision to participate in the election. Ncube said that Tsvangirai had conveyed that message to Mugabe in a letter.

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110. (C) Ncube said that SAG interlocutors told the MDC that Mugabe had undertaken to Mbeki on the margins of the UNGA in September that inter-party talks on the constitution would be revived soon. SAG sources later said that the politburo was scheduled to meet on November 3, when Mugabe would bless the recommencement of talks. However, Chinamasa has been unable to confirm any of this to Ncube. When they last spoke earlier in the week, Chinamasa told Ncube to talk to Minister for Security Nicholas Goche, who has since been unavailable. Ncube concluded that these developments were consistent with the ruling party's long-term strategy of using "talks on talks" to string out the SAG and the MDC, appearing to be willing to talk without ever talking meaningfully.

#### Comment

111. (C) The ruling party's overarching priority remains to win the March elections and win big - big enough to amend the constitution on its own. Nonetheless, the party is stepping up efforts to market its election internationally, at least to the region and its developing world "friends." The MFA convened diplomats from Non-Aligned Movement embassies on November 1 to brief them on election-related developments. At the briefing, Foreign Minister Mudenge rejected MDC demands that the election be delayed and castigated the EU for planning to condemn Zimbabwe with an UNGA resolution

"based on stale reports from three years ago," a move he alleged indicated that they had prejudged the election. He maintained that Zimbabwe had the region's strongest opposition party and was ahead of most of SADC in implementing SADC's electoral principles - proof of the Government's commitment to multiparty democracy. The reportedly meek response from the audience and muted reaction from regional counterparts will fortify ruling party confidence in its strategy.

12. (C) The GOZ can be expected to make additional marginal (but not decisive) improvements in the electoral environment, as the gradual opening of campaign space indicates. The electoral bill's modest reforms received their second reading in the Parliament and elicited little outcry in a recent sparsely attended public hearing conducted on the bill by the parliamentary committee; they will likely pass in the coming weeks, in time to be implemented for the March election. The GOZ reportedly is working on election-related media access rules, but ministers have proclaimed publicly that they will apply only to parties contending in elections - an implicit (and mostly disingenuous) enticement for the MDC to participate. The MDC will be challenged to take advantage of these openings to rekindle hope and energy among an electorate that appears increasingly resigned to a ruling party victory.

13. (C) The MDC leadership hopes that its ambitious travel agenda will burnish its image at home and abroad, will generate more regional pressure on the GOZ, and will stimulate party fund-raising efforts, particularly with the growing Zimbabwean diaspora. The strategy is not without costs, however. The party will be without much of its leadership at home for a lengthy and potentially important period in the run-up to elections, potentially handicapping its ability to exploit the small openings being afforded it as the ruling party dresses up its election administration. Moreover, the public posturing with Western governments is a double-edged sword -- it may bolster flagging morale among party faithful but it plays into the hands of the GOZ propagandists, who exaggerate the party's western orientation in playing to unaligned domestic and regional audiences. Finally, few things raise the hackles of travel sanctioned ruling party officials more than high profile opposition globe-trotting. Tsvangirai's publicized meetings abroad could provoke a backlash, including an effort to go after Tsvangirai's passport again in connection with purported

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treason charges. We do not discount the possibility that a backlash could touch us as well; a ZANU-PF official once indicated privately to us that reports he had received from the ANC that the USG was funding MDC travel, if true, could adversely affect bilateral relations.

DELL